LETTER TO THE EDITOR

National HIV Telephone Consultation Line

To the Editor:—The Holmes editorial on who should provide care to HIV-infected patients¹ addresses the difficulty of keeping up-to-date in this rapidly changing area, especially for clinicians with few HIV/AIDS patients. He emphasizes the importance of HIV/AIDS care experience as a major factor in outcomes and points out that clinicians desire more knowledge about HIV/AIDS care. Clinicians have also expressed interest in telephone consultation for HIV-related matters.^{2,3}

Holmes reminds us that information access does not always suffice, and when complex management decisions are required, access to experienced clinicians is necessary. His list of HIV resources, however, did not mention the National HIV Telephone Consultation Service ("Warmline"), a toll-free service for health care providers. The Warmline is a service of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) AIDS Education and Training Centers (AIDS-ETC). The Warmline is staffed by physicians, clinical pharmacists, and nurse practitioners actively involved in HIV care. The service is as much educational as consultative, addressing "unrecognized information needs"⁴ and responding to questions that otherwise might have remained unasked.

Between May 1, 1993, and April 30, 1997, the Warmline received more than 18,000 questions, with primary care physicians (family physicians, general practitioners, and general internists) accounting for 38% of these questions. More than 40% of the primary care physicians made repeated calls to the Warmline, several having called more than 50 times. A broad spectrum of primary care physicians use the service. Although the majority have

few HIV-positive patients at their first call (42% had 1–3 patients), others care for large numbers of HIV-positive patients (15% had 26 or more patients). The most common clinical questions for primary care physicians concern antiretroviral treatment, laboratory findings (especially viral load testing and CD4+ lymphocyte count interpretation), general HIV clinical management, and the management of *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia (PCP), *Mycobacterium avium* complex (MAC) disease, and cytomegalovirus (CMV) disease.

Regardless of the future directions of HIV primary care, clinicians currently need prompt and accessible HIV information and consultation, as Holmes indicates. The Internet sources he listed provide valuable and extensive information. Additional information and access to clinical guidelines is available at other sites (e.g., from the CDC National AIDS Clearinghouse at <http://www.cdcnac.org>, and the HIV/AIDS Treatment Information Service at <http://www.hivatis.org>). The most common source of education and case consultation is, of course, consultants in the community. Some universities and regional or state organizations have clinical consultation services. For others, our National HIV Telephone Consultation Service (Warmline) can provide the case-by-case dialogue that is so often essential to clinical management. The Warmline is available at 1-800-933-3413 between 7:30 AM and 5:00 PM (PST). Further information about the Warmline can be obtained on the Internet at <http://itsa.ucsf.edu/warmline>. We wish to make sure JGIM readers and their colleagues are aware of this service.—**PETRA LILJESTRAND, PhD**, and **RONALD H. GOLDSCHMIDT, MD**, HRSA/AIDS ETC National HIV Telephone Consultation Service and Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of California, San Francisco.

JGIM welcomes your letters and comments. Letters may contain brief commentaries on articles published in the Journal, illustrative case reports, general suggestions for improving the Journal, or other information of interest to readers. Letters to the Editor should not exceed 450 words in length and should be sent in triplicate (typed, double-spaced). We cannot guarantee publication and we may edit to improve readability.

You may send your letters to us by mail, fax, or e-mail: JGIM, Veterans Affairs Medical Center (JGIM-111), University and Woodland Avenues, Philadelphia, PA 19104; fax: 215-823-4450; e-mail: jgim@mail.med.upenn.edu.

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